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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ANAP-DP MERGER TALKS BEGIN INAUSPICIOUSLY

REF: ANKARA 755

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: The chairmen of Turkey's two struggling center-right parties, the Democrat Party (DP) and Motherland Party (ANAP), met on June 3 to recommence talks to merge their two parties. They agreed that the two parties should become one by, at latest, December 31. They are banking, against the odds, that they will naturally fill a vacancy on the political center-right vacated by a receding AKP. End Summary.

12. (C) In a press conference following their meeting, DP Chairman Husamettin Cindoruk and ANAP Chairman Salih Uzun appeared with former prime minister and ANAP chairman Mesut Yilmaz, whom they had invited to participate in unification negotiations. Together, they announced that they would found a commission comprised of eight members, four from each party, to continue negotiations and to reach a merger by the end of 2009. The hope is that, combined, the two parties would be able to provide a viable alternative to the Justice and Development Party (AKP) on the center-right, or at least enough of an alternative to surpass the meager 4.1 percent of the vote they collectively earned in March's nationwide local elections.

13. (C) The merger negotiations are off to an inauspicious start. That the two parties thought it a good idea to summon Mesut Yilmaz -- notorious for leading ANAP to a series of election failures at the same time it reached the heights of institutionalized corruption -- shows that they are out of touch with public opinion. (Note: Yilmaz was clear in stating that his participation in the party merger would not continue. End note.) Cindoruk, himself a relic of the deeply corrupt years of DP's precursor party, the True Path Party (DYP), also conjures up memories of the military's manipulations of parliament in 1997, which brought down a coalition government led by Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, who headed a religiously-oriented political party (REFTEL). Furthermore, ANAP and DP tried to merge in 2007, in order to stand together in parliamentary elections in 2007, but the talks broke down acrimoniously over who would chair the new party. Bulent Akarcali, a former ANAP minister, was openly dismissive of the merger strategy, telling us the parties are clearly grasping at straws, and the result of this merger will be "stillborn."

14. (C) Comment: Akarcali is probably right. ANAP and DP have little fresh to add to Turkey's political debate and have dwindling resources. There is only an outside chance that they could get their act together in time to garner the 10 percent necessary to enter parliament in the next

elections, currently scheduled for 2011. They need the governing AKP to suffer a series of political defeats for the center-right to become an open field. Some potential defeats loom on the horizon: a prolonged economic crisis, public argument with the EU over Cyprus talks, and legal problems concerning the Deniz Feneri charity organization's fraud case are possible examples. Even still, center-right voters will need a lot more incentive to return to ANAP and DP than Cindoruk and Uslu are currently offering.

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